



Evercreech

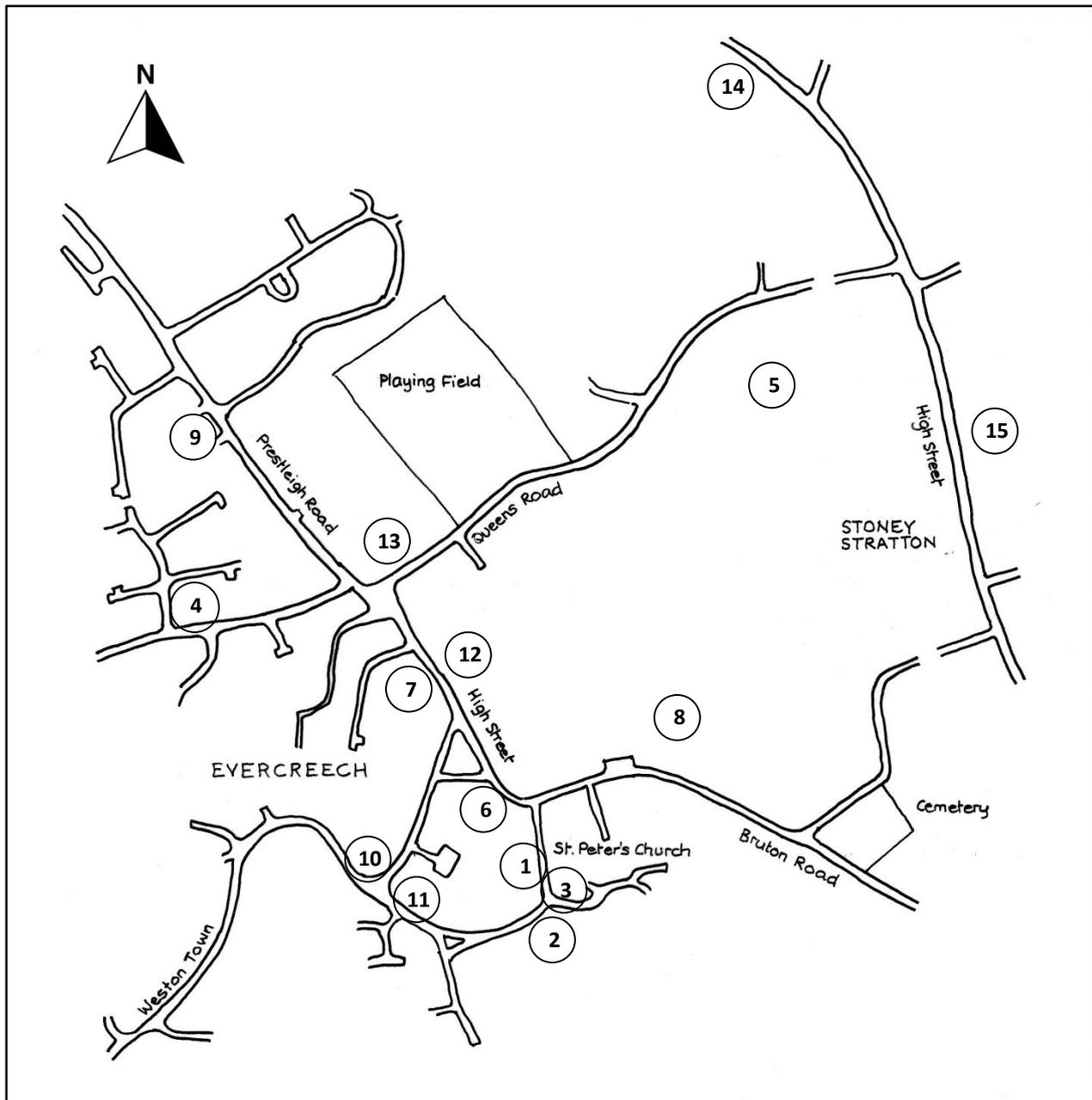
Kept Calm

And

Carried On

1939 - 1945

WAR TIME EVERCREECH



KEY TO MAP

- | | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 The Old School | 6 The Long House | 11 Whitehead's Garage |
| 2 The Old Hall | 7 Evercreech House | 12 Park House |
| 3 Original Vicarage | 8 Pond | 13 Batt's Cottage |
| 4 Enfield Works | 9 Rockleaze | 14 Springfield House |
| 5 Long Close | 10 Methodist Chapel and Schoolroom | 15 Biscuit Packing Works |

Introduction

Twenty years after the Great War (1914-1918) in which Evercreech lost 42 men, the village found itself caught up in another world war.

In the inter-war years agriculture still employed large numbers of men. The milk factory was a major employer as was Enfield Works where metal goods were made, Allen's Mineral Waters, the Brick Works and many smaller enterprises, which all made Evercreech a good place in which to live and work. The railway stations, Evercreech New in the village and Evercreech Junction at Southwood were very busy.

1939

War was declared on 4th September 1939. When the school re-opened after the summer holidays it was the village billeting office where teachers and villagers waited anxiously for the arrival of buses from Shepton Mallet station bringing 215 children, 18 teachers and 6 helpers from two East London schools: St Luke's Church of England School and St Margaret's Roman Catholic School, both from West Ham. All the children carried their gas masks in boxes and a bag of their possessions. The children were bewildered, tired and often tearful. The billeting officer had to pair up the waiting villagers' requests for 'a strong boy' or a 'tidy little girl' with the assembled crowd. It must have been a scene of organised chaos.

The children and teachers were found homes in the village, as people opened up their houses and took their guests back to a meal and spare beds. The burden of feeding and caring for these extra guests fell largely on the women. Rationing made it hard to feed extra mouths although each child brought their own ration book. Laundry was a constant problem as children, separated from their mothers, often wet the bed. Stories of head lice, body lice, children sewn into layers of filthy paper are well-known. Mrs Lambert of Batt's Cottage (see map) was one of the local mothers who volunteered to take evacuees. National recognition for the efforts of temporary adoptive mothers was eventually rewarded after the war with a certificate signed by Queen Elizabeth, wife of King George VI.

It was impossible to fit all the children in the existing school buildings (see map) to work at the same time so a shift system was quickly devised, and other village buildings pressed into use. The Old Hall at the top of Oxford Street was used as a temporary classroom. Built in 1896 the hall had rooms for meetings and a subscription reading room. In 1937 it had been replaced by the current Village Hall and had become a store for Charlton's the builders. The former billiard room, which was being used as a carpenter's workshop, was cleared for use by the evacuee children and their teachers.



Old Hall (arrowed) in Oxford Street (see map)

In September 1939 petrol rationing began to make travel in rural areas especially difficult. Gas masks were issued in early September and delivered house to house. Gas had been used to such dreadful effect in WWI that the government were taking no chances. The fact that the masks were never used is thought to be because the Germans soon knew of the distribution and felt that gas was not worth using against such a well-prepared civilian population.

Very quickly men in the Territorials were called up and regular soldiers reported for duty. Women were expected to do war service too and about 14 young Evercreech women were in the WRNS, known as Wrens (Navy), WAAF (Airforce), ATS (Army) and VAD (hospitals). Identity cards were issued on 1st October and everyone was required to carry one.

The blackout had started early in September when everyone had to put up dark curtains at their windows and take all steps to avoid showing light. ARP (Air Raid Precaution) wardens were appointed to cycle round the streets to look for chinks of light and if they saw one, they were empowered to insist that the householder cover the light immediately. The only bomb to fall in Evercreech may have been the result of a carelessly shown light according to local gossip, but the bomber may have been aiming for railway lines or he simply jettisoned his load flying back from attacking Bristol. The bomb fell in Long Close, the field between The Bell Inn and houses on the south side of Shapway Lane, all of which had their windows blown out and their downpipes peppered with shrapnel. A number of cows were killed but no people injured. The overhead telephone wires were brought down in Shapway Lane by the blast. As late as the 1970s broken glass was still being dug up in gardens in that part of the village and in one house re-papering revealed plastered over damage on a wall with the words 'shrapnel hit here' written in pencil by a young builder who confirmed his writing before he retired.

1940

As more men left to fight women began to take over their roles. Betty Lambert who went to work on the railway at Evercreech Junction as a junior porter wrote:

'I joined the line in 1940 under the "Essential Services Order" for the duration of the war. After a fatal accident at the station left a vacancy on the staff, I became a Lampman. They sent me a uniform intended for a man which came down to my ankles. My role was to climb a very long ladder to keep the signal lamps clean. That winter was so cold that metal polish froze in the cans and icicles hung from the telegraph poles. One day when I clambered up to the signals wearing woollen mittens which were wet, I found my fingers had frozen to the ladder rail.'



Betty Lambert the Lamp Lady

Air raid sirens were set up everywhere on high buildings; the siren at Shepton Mallet was on the Anglo Brewery. There was a searchlight on Prestleigh Hill to pick out German planes who might try to bomb the railway viaduct. The ringing of church bells was forbidden from 1940 except for their use as air raid warnings. Evercreech people missed hearing their famous peal of ten bells, although with many ringers away in uniform it became harder to assemble a ringing team.

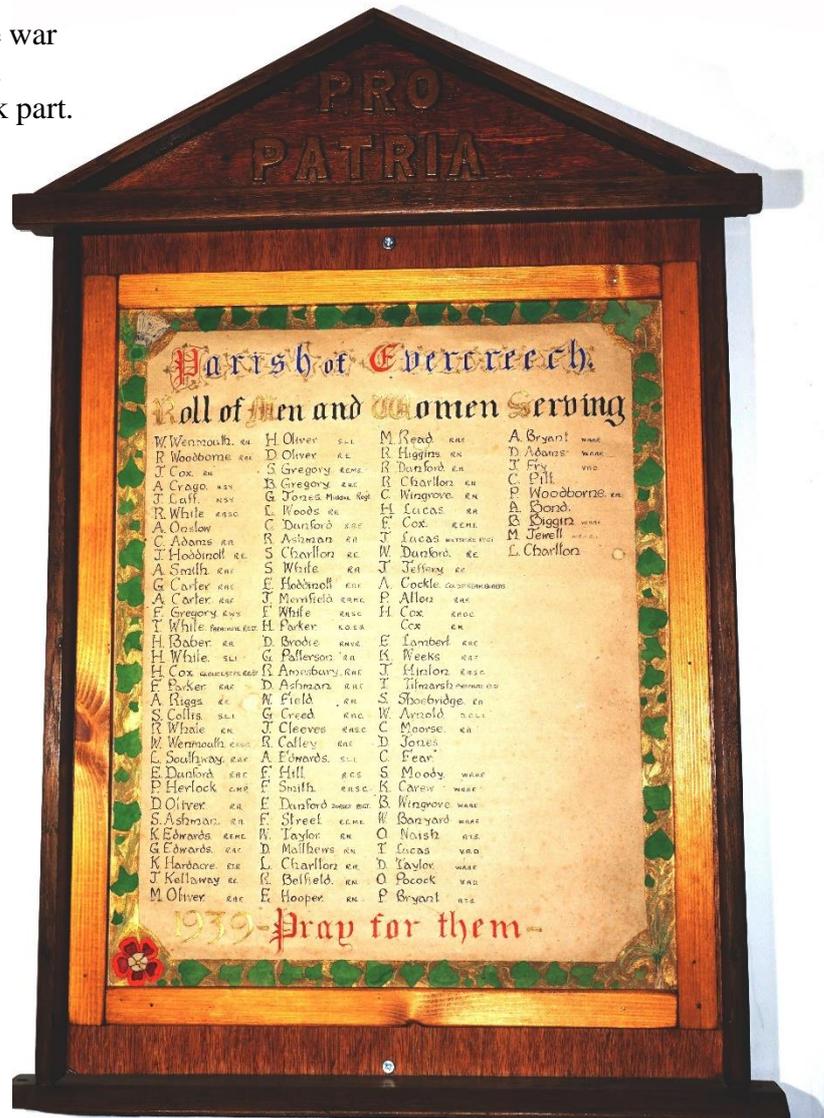
Meat rationing began in March 1940. The village had a number of butcher's shops and slaughterhouses at that date, including those of George Dunford, Frank Cox, Charles King and Alfred Haines. Everyone had to produce their ration books which the retailer stamped and removed coupons for every purchase. A pig club was run by Mr Eli Jenkins owner of the Enfield Works which made agricultural equipment. Pig clubs were encouraged nationally, their members bought a pig between them and fed it with their waste food and kitchen scraps. They were then allowed to share half of the resulting pork between themselves, the other half had to go to the Ministry of Food. The school started a Rabbit Club, raising rabbits to add to the meagre meat supply and they grew vegetables from seeds supplied by the county authorities on their allotments behind the school.

Sugar was in short supply so women got together, usually organised by the WI, who were given supplies of sugar, to have sessions for making jam from garden and hedgerow fruit and marmalade while oranges were still available early in the war.

Conscription for men from the ages of 20-23 was introduced in 1939; the 18 to 20 year olds were not considered at first, their conscription came later in the war.

There is a list of all who served in the war displayed on the wall in The Bell Inn. The list includes the women who took part.

*The Bell Inn enlisted list
(see transcript on page 19)*



In the dark days of May 1940 Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War, broadcast an appeal for men between 17 and 65, who were not in the military to offer their services to a new force called the Local Defence Force. Winston Churchill, who saw their potential, gave them a new name 'The Home Guard' and eventually they received uniforms and weapons. In spite of their 'Dad's Army' image they would have had vital roles to play had we been invaded. The Evercreech platoon was led by Jimmy Judd and ex Regimental Sergeant Major Reg Goverd, the Landlord of The Bell Inn. Men with experience from the previous war had very useful skills. In 1996 local Farmer Jim Doble wrote in his wartime memories, *'drill and rifle practice were done at the Mendip Beacon Butts and I first threw a Mills Bomb (hand grenade) on Creech Hill. We were driven to a quarry in the back of Bill Feaver's coal lorry for spigot mortar (anti-tank weapon) practice.*



Evercreech Home Guard

In May and June 1940 after the evacuation of the army at Dunkirk by the famous fleet of 'little ships' the rescued men spread out into towns and villages including Evercreech where they were re-equipped and regrouped. Jim Doble remembered *'various bodies of soldiers came and went and changed the social scene in the village'*. The account book for Jenkins' works in 1940 included items supplied to 128 Infantry Brigade whose headquarters were Rockleaze (see map).

Plans were made for defence in the event of an invasion. The Dunkirk evacuation made military minds consider the possibility of setting up resistance units, and Somerset was in the front line although it is a rural county with few big cities or industrial areas. It was thought possible that an invasion might not come by the obvious short Calais to Dover route, which was very heavily defended, but the invaders might choose to enter via Lyme Bay. A decision was taken to abandon any idea of defending Devon or Cornwall, but strong lines of defence were quickly built across Dorset and Somerset.

Signposts had their direction arms removed to confuse invaders and tank traps and pill boxes were built to contain guns manned by the Home Guard to cover roads and bridges.

Resistance units were covertly created in rural areas and those who took part sworn to a secrecy which lasted until recent times. Farmers and country people were chosen partly because they were thought to be politically stable, unlike those in industrial areas who might have socialist or even Communist sympathies. Country men could often shoot, many owned guns and farmers knew the lie of the land intimately. These units were set up as Auxiliary Units to the Home Guard throughout the country some of them very close to Evercreech. The volunteers, who were sworn to secrecy, dug hidden bunkers called Operational Bases (OBs), underground stations where stores were kept and from where the resistance could operate. They had bunks, fourteen days food supply, explosives, sabotage equipment and ammunition. Weapons were supplied by the Americans: two ship loads of ex First World War weapons were sent by President Roosevelt, then a large shipment of weapons, mostly handguns confiscated from criminals by the New York Police Department.

The men were told that if they did have to fight, they could expect to survive for two weeks at the most. As state sponsored terrorists they were outside the Geneva Convention and therefore not likely to have been taken prisoner but summarily shot. The men who told no one, not even their families, of this undertaking sometimes had to put up with comments in their communities about not being in uniform or not 'doing their bit' for the war effort.

As well as the Operational Patrols of the Auxiliary units there was the Special Duties Section which included women and girls. Their job would have been to act as spies after invasion communicating with the Operational Units details of the enemy's activities. They too would have been shot if discovered.

There was a local Operational Base on Creech Hill above Milton Clevedon, replacing one at Bramble Ditch which had been compromised. South Hill House in Cranmore became the home of the men of the North and East Somerset Scout section who were billeted in the stable block at South Hill. Scout in this sense is nothing to do with Baden Powell's youngsters but men with skills to 'scout' and undertake reconnaissance.

The OB at Milton Clevedon was accidentally found by three Evercreech schoolboys, Robin Dunford, Tom Green and Nobby Pitt who ventured below ground but were unable to find the entrance on a second visit. On another occasion schoolboy John Gadd recalled *'one Saturday morning I noticed a file of six men carrying backpacks moving up the path into the woods at the summit of Creech Hill. I thought they were rabbiting or setting snares. Next day I went to 'lift' one or two of their night's haul they would never notice! I found nothing, but a careful search in the undergrowth revealed a hasp on a trapdoor, quite new. I cleared away the loose grass and fern covering it up and saw a new corrugated tin shaft leading down into the gloom, with a wooden ladder on one side. Later I brought a schoolfriend John Bishop with a torch. He climbed down part way and saw ropes, boxes and a shotgun, but alarmed as to what it might be investigated no further, came out and we made all good again on the surface. On Monday morning at school we reported our discovery to Rupert Martin our headmaster, as we felt sure we had discovered a "fifth column" (spy) hideout'*. The boys were firmly told never to say a word about their discovery, not even to their family and they never did until Tim Wray researched his book *Somerset Underground* in 2016. The trapdoor was modified to prevent entry after that but the Creech Hill OB was almost revealed on three other occasions.

Everyone had extra jobs to do. In Jim Doble's wartime memories he wrote *'Percy Allen was in charge of the ARP at night but continued to run his mineral water works. Reg Hillard ran his butcher's shop by day and manned his call rota in the Fire Service in turn. Harry Sanger mended a few cars at Whitehead's garage and donned his Special Constable's uniform after work.'*

Driving around became very difficult after streetlights were turned off, car headlights masked and torches at first forbidden. There were so many fatal road accidents nationally that the rules were relaxed, and people later remembered asking passengers to lean out of car windows with a torch to find the road edge. In some places white lines were drawn down roads to help and even a chequerboard of white, painted on kerbs.

Fear of bombing meant that householders were told to paste strips of linen, paper or cellulose in a criss-cross pattern over their windows to prevent broken glass being blown inwards by bomb blast.

The Long House with taped upper windows



1941

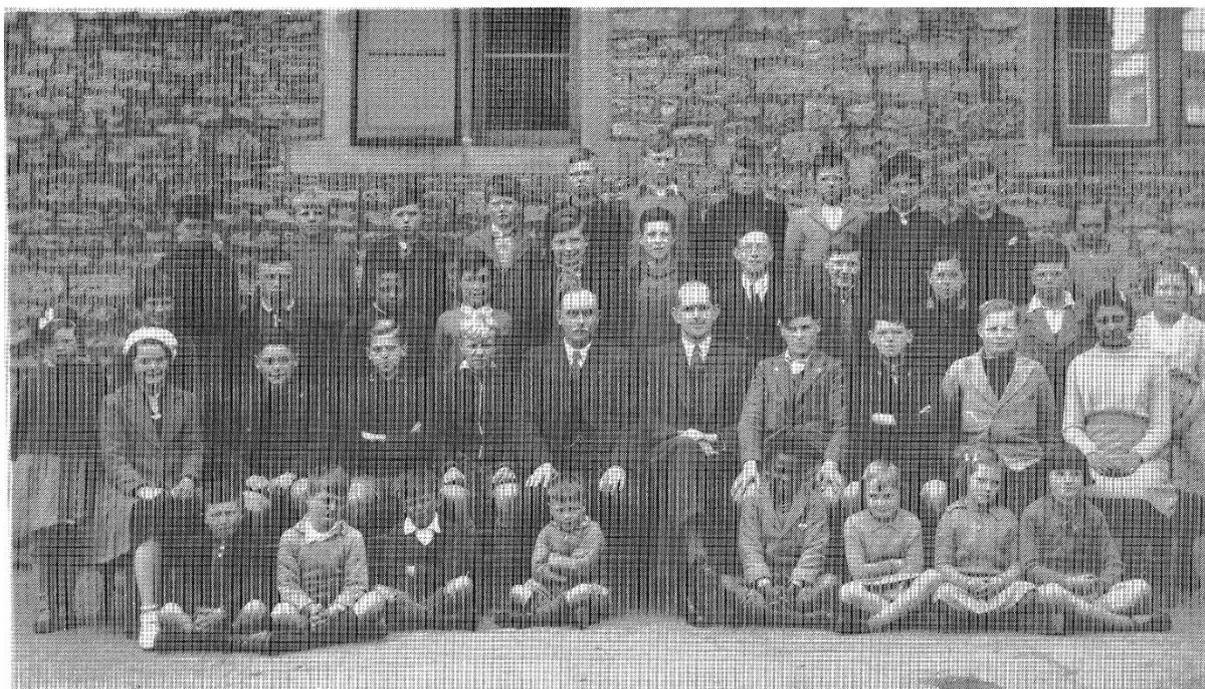
To help the 'Dig For Victory' campaign Mrs Roosevelt, wife of the American President, sent vegetable seeds to every Women's Institute in the UK in April 1941. The gift included peas, dwarf French beans, carrot and onion seeds. The onion seeds were very welcome as supplies of onions, which had been imported from Brittany and the Channel Islands, disappeared almost overnight. In the increasingly limited wartime diet onions helped flavour dishes. In Evercreech WI members planted the American seeds and marketed the homegrown vegetables. The school also used land behind the classrooms as an allotment.

Everywhere there were Spitfire Funds. Money was raised by having dances, whist drives and sales of work to build more planes. War Savings were encouraged and the resulting money acknowledged.

Clothes were rationed from 1941. Everyone had a limited number of coupons so 'Make Do And Mend' became the order of the day. Old clothes were patched and repaired, and new ones made at home although fabric was also 'on points'. At first furnishing and curtain fabric was not rationed nor was black-out material, so at dances women often wore black dresses or dresses made of coloured

and patterned curtain material. Parachute silk was highly sought after for underwear and wedding dresses. Coupons were given in return for outgrown children's clothes donated to the WVS (Women's Voluntary Service). The WVS had an Evercreech branch run by Mrs Luff which had fifteen members. Their main role in the village would have been to run a rest centre in the Methodist schoolroom with meals for anyone bombed out of their home. Founded in 1938 the WVS was a women's organisation that had a very important role in the second world war, especially in towns and cities where the WI was not represented.

In May 1941, after Bristol was bombed more children arrived in Evercreech. This time about 50 children from Bristol schools arrived, so more classrooms were created in The Bell Inn and the Vicarage. All the children, both from London and from Bristol had experienced bombing.



School Staff and some of the Evacuees

Springfield House in Stoney Stratton (see map) became an Evacuee Hostel for 20-30 boys most of whom had problems. Some boys were orphans as a result of the bombing, some had simply been abandoned.

In the school Log Book the head teacher wrote after three boys absconded '*one boy wanted to get to his grandmother's in London to find out why he had not heard from his father in the services for six months, (actually his father is a deserter) another boy simply did not want to go back to relatives who did not want him. The third boy aged eleven was found exhausted.*' Although the boys greatly added to the problems at the school, teachers were aware that these children were war casualties.

Weston's biscuit factory in Bristol was bombed so they moved their packing departments out into the countryside; one of these was in Stoney Stratton. In an old barn behind Stratton High Street, where there is now a house called Walnut Barn, local women packed biscuits during the war for distribution to West Country shops.

Every area in the country had to create a 'War Book' on the instructions of the National Invasion Committee. These books were issued by the Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence. The Evercreech, Milton Clevedon and Lamyatt War Book (see Appendix) now preserved at the Heritage Centre in Taunton lists everything needed for the war effort. All vehicles were counted and wells

identified in case the water supply was put out of action. Evercreech listed over 30 wells, some of which may still exist covered over in gardens. Equipment such as wheelbarrows, picks and shovels etc were counted and suitable sites earmarked for the digging of latrines and even for the burying of the dead. An emergency mortuary was designated for the village, although when inspected it was found to be full of stored cheese! Had there been injuries as a result of bombing a first aid post was designated at 'the clinic' with any overflow to be taken to Whitehead's Garage. Welfare Clinics, normally held in the old Methodist schoolroom (see map) would have been suspended if the room had been needed as a first aid centre. The church vestry was the duty room for fire watchers who had sand, water and stirrup pumps ready. In the event of incendiary bombs falling on the church roof the fire watchers were to call the ARP wardens for immediate help. After the terrible example of Coventry Cathedral's roof catching fire causing the loss of the medieval building, church roofs were recognised as very vulnerable.

Willing people took on jobs like welfare of evacuees, fire officer, food organiser, transport officer. All the names and roles are listed in the War Book, so it is a fascinating social document of the day.

Nationally there were collections of paper, metal, rags and bones, and food waste collected to feed pigs. Stale bread was either made into bread pudding to feed the family or added to the pig swill bucket with other food waste to go to the local pig farm.

School children took part in the wastepaper collections, metal was willingly given for the manufacture of aircraft. Mr J. Rowe organised the collection of iron railings, gates and even the old parish pump. People gave their spare pots and pans but sadly much of the metal was never used and was found stockpiled after the war all over the country.

Farming became a vital industry as the German U boats took their toll of ships importing food supplies. Farmers were asked to place obstacles in the fields and gateways to deter aeroplanes landing. The War Agricultural Committees, which had great power, could insist that fields were ploughed which had always been pasture. There are many stories of farmers and the committee members clashing and even farm families being ejected from their homes in other parts of the country for failure to comply with orders. Land girls, who replaced men on the land, were trained at Cannington College and organised locally from Steanbow Farm, Pilton.

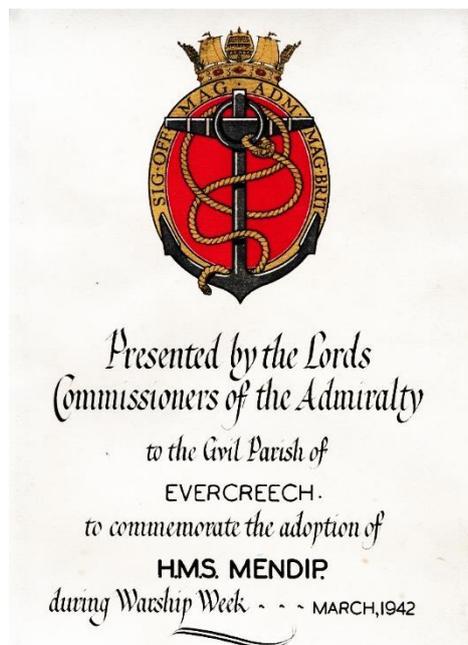
Many local farms used prisoners of war as farm labour. There were 6 prisoner of war camps in Somerset. One of the closest to Evercreech was Penleigh Camp outside Wells which eventually became the site of EMI. Moving men around in wartime was not easy, so groups were sometimes housed in hostels close to their place of work, others were collected by farmers each morning. In this area most of the first prisoners to arrive on farms were Italian; German prisoners arrived in large numbers after D Day and the Normandy landings. Many Italian and German surnames still remain in the local population as reminders that not all prisoners went home at the end of the war after friendships and marriages had been made.

In December 1941 fat, sugar and eggs were hoarded for weeks to create cakes and puddings for Christmas. The very small amounts of dried fruit available on ration were supplemented by the use of grated carrot and grated apple.

Presents for Christmas that year were usually homemade. Toys were almost unobtainable, so soft toys were knitted, and handmade wooden toys were popular. People gave each other jars of jam, knitted gloves and scarves. If you kept poultry eggs were a very welcome gift.

1942

In 1942 the village was busy raising funds to support HMS Mendip. During the war it was usual for towns, villages and organisations to adopt a ship, often of a suitable name. Money was raised by running sales of work and produce, and Whist Drives which were very popular especially in wartime when entertainment was limited. From the picture below it would seem that a large model was made and put on display to raise money which went to the ship's comfort fund.



Collection Day for HMS Mendip

In July 1942 the first Evercreech man was killed on active service (see In Memoriam). He was Douglas Brodie RNVR born in Tetbury, Gloucestershire. His father, Desborough Brodie, became the Evercreech doctor when his son was 24. How much time his son ever spent in the village is questionable as he was 35 when he died, but he had probably visited his father at Park House and met local people. Villagers would certainly have been very sympathetic for Dr and Mrs Brodie's loss.

A notable event of 1942 was the arrival in Evercreech of American soldiers. On 18th September 1942 sixty men of A Company and 30 men of B Company 347th Engineer Service Regiment arrived in the village. Many of these men had come from the oil industry and together they became The Engineer Pipeline Company, a unique group and the first of that name in US military history. Their remit was to install fuel pipelines and storage tanks anywhere that the military were going to need fuel.

The men were billeted in Evercreech House and other places including Rockleaze and The Bell Inn. In Rockleaze the parlour was the company orderly room and officers slept in the bare rooms upstairs. Neighbours would have immediately been aware of their presence as motorcycle couriers arrived day and night with messages for the company supply officer who had to go in person to London, or a depot at Newbury, to collect equipment.

Drill was held in front of the Village Hall with an interested audience of villagers, especially children when they weren't in school. One day, at the end of the soldiers' stay here they were standing to attention, with an audience of villagers, being lectured by a Captain Juszyzck who was telling the men that they were soon to be in action against the German army and fighting for their lives. Three visiting senior officers heard this breach of security with horror and Captain Juszyzck soon disappeared from the village. Clearly, he had not heard the propaganda phrases 'Careless Talk Costs Lives' and 'Careless Lips Sink Ships'.

The American engineers included a number of musicians: Sergeant Wisnieski played the accordion, Sergeant Campbell, guitar and Sergeant Frank Smith played the fiddle. On a number of occasions, the men put on a dance for which they charged girls two shillings (10p) for entrance: they came from miles around. One US soldier remembered another time; *'When, at company headquarters, we officers heard that the place was jammed, we put on our Class A greens (dress uniform) and went down to the hall. While making my way across the room, some female Godzilla grabbed me and said "I paid to get in here and no one has danced with me". She whirled me away in a half-nelson, and to this day I have been trying to forget the words to "The Hokey Pokey".'* We can guess he was dragged into a long line of the Hokey Cokey! These memories come from a veteran William 'Bill' Trethewey who returned to the village in 1988 before publishing his memoirs (see bibliography).

Dances with the various groups of Americans who came to the village were popular throughout the war. The Americans were renowned for being generous with gifts of nylons and sweets. They had more money to spend and better uniforms than our men and had the novelty of coming from another more sophisticated world.

The old Methodist school room (see map) was used as a place where soldiers could relax. Older Methodists recall Sunday services in the main chapel being enlivened by the sounds of darts hitting the dart board hanging on the inside of the schoolroom door!

During the day the men practised laying a pipeline from the pond behind The Bell Inn. The line passed through five fields of long grass so that the men were often soaked from the knees down in dew and wet weather. The pipeline had to go over walls and hedges where the men practised clamping sections together. Unfortunately, they were soon told to stop these operations as local farmers thought that they might spread Foot and Mouth disease among the cattle.

By October the unit prepared to move out with much speculation as to their destination - possibly France or Norway. On 28th October 1942 the first section of 3 officers and 95 men were taken by truck to Shepton Mallet where they were put on trains to Scotland where, in the port of Gourock, Glasgow, they boarded the Empress of Canada still unaware of their destination. The remainder of the company went by train to Liverpool on October 30th where they boarded a ship called The Brazil. The Empress of Canada arrived in the port of Mers el Kebir, Algeria. All the men took part in the landings code-named Operation Torch commanded by General Dwight D. Eisenhower.

The engineers who had trained in Evercreech had a vital role in the desert war in North Africa which was to be won in 1943. They laid pipes and built storage tanks that supplied aviation fuel and fuel for the tanks and vehicles of General Anderson's 1st army enabling them to cut off the Germans' retreat and to link up with General Montgomery after the battle of El Alamein. The pipeline unit went on to fight in Sicily, up through Italy and France until finally, in 1945, they arrived in Germany.

Although their stay in Evercreech was very brief theirs is a unique fragment of Second World War history. Many towns and villages in the UK had US soldiers stationed in their midst, but few were as unusual as this group who came to our village. In 2017 an evacuee who returned to the village walked around and when he reached Evercreech House he said *'the last time I saw this gate there was a fully armed American soldier on guard here'*.

Rationing meant that all food was in short supply. An adult weekly allowance of cheese was limited to two ounces (60g) and cooking fats such as butter and lard down to eight ounces (250g) of which only two ounces (60g) could be butter. Full English breakfast was off the menu when an adult was allowed only one egg per week and four ounces (125g) of bacon. One of the hardest rations to bear was the 60g (2oz) allowance of tea to make the great British cuppa. Few British people drank coffee at this time and the only available coffee was Camp 'coffee', a sweetened brown liquid made from Chicory essence. Dried egg became available but was not popular; although useful in cakes and baking it had a peculiar taste and texture when reconstituted with water to make egg for scrambled or other liquid egg recipes. Bread was not rationed until after the war but the National Loaf, a wheatmeal bread, was the only bread you could buy. Meat was rationed by price not by weight so cheaper cuts could be bought in greater quantities than best cuts, but none were easily obtainable. Horse meat was on the market but was mostly used to feed dogs. Spam, which is synonymous with WW2, had been launched in 1937 in the USA. It was tinned pork shoulder which needed no refrigeration. Spam was fed to American soldiers in huge quantities. It came to Britain when Lease Lend started. This was an arrangement when the US sent war materials, such as ammunition, tanks, aeroplanes, trucks, tractors and food to the Allies on a deferred payment system. The debt was not finally paid off until 2006.

1943

In 1943 an American soldier married a local girl in the Methodist chapel. The bride, who was in the ATS, eventually sailed for America in 1946 on the Queen Mary, one of the ships used to take GI brides to their new home.

Inevitably a few girls chose to stay behind, some with children fathered by American soldiers. Some years later an Evercreech man commented that he was always proud of the way that people in the village accepted the soldiers' children who, unlike the evacuees, did not leave after the war but became part of the village community.

By this stage of the war everyone had to play their part, even the children. Guides, Brownies, Scouts and Cubs collected toys and games for the evacuees at school, where they were asked to befriend evacuees. Children collected tin foil, bottle tops, jam jars and foreign coins. The older girls knitted hats and scarves for air raid victims; the younger ones knitted dishcloths to sell.

The WI organised women and children to pick blackberries which were sold at fourpence (about 2p) per 1lb (450g) for jam and jelly making. They also collected rose hips for which pickers were paid 3d (1p) for each 1lb (450g). The rosehips were made into syrup by a company called Delrosa. The wartime diet was very short of vitamin C with no citrus fruit coming from overseas, so Rosehip syrup and concentrated orange juice were made available at welfare clinics and fed to babies and young children.

ANGLO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE.

S/Sgt. Fred A. Glade, U.S. Army, of Manhattan, Illinois, and Corpl. Elsie Davis, of the A.T.S., British Forces, were united in marriage in the Methodist Chapel, Evercreech, on Saturday.

The bride was given in marriage by 1st Lieut. C. L. Davis, U.S. Army. The attendants were S/Sgt. John Dickey, U.S. Army, and Mrs. Amy Parker, of Evercreech.

The bride and groom left for a short honeymoon after which they will both return to their respective stations. The groom is a Motor Sergeant with the U.S. Army and the bride a teletype operator with the British Forces.

Shepton Mallet Journal report of Wartime Wedding

Another war effort was the packing of Red Cross parcels to be sent to prisoners of war. These were packed in cardboard boxes and typically contained writing paper and a pencil, a paperback book, often a mystery or detective story, shaving soap and razor blades, a new 2/6 piece (13p) a pack of cards, something knitted like socks or a scarf, cigarettes if obtainable, all wrapped with multiple layers of strong string which the men in prisons could put to use. Seeds were popular so that men could grow vegetables to supplement their meagre diet in German camps where gardening was sometimes allowed. One soldier Private J. Hoddinott, who spent five years as a prisoner of war, said that the Red Cross parcels and post from the village had been their salvation.

Two village men were killed in 1943. In January Roy Belfield lost his life when his ship, a Corvette named H.M.S. Samphire, was sunk by an Italian submarine in the Mediterranean. Someone who knew him said 'he never wanted to go': Roy was only 20 years old (see In Memoriam). One of the church bells, re-cast after the war, was inscribed with the name of Roy Belfield and others of this parish who made the supreme sacrifice. The re-casting was the gift of Mr & Mrs R. Gulliver. Roy Belfield had worked on Mr Gulliver's farm before the war.



Roy Belfield



Memorial Bell

In April 1943 the government allowed church bells to be rung for Easter as the threat of invasion had passed.

In June 1943 Roy Locke Amesbury, who was a Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, was shot down over Germany; he died aged 22 (see In Memoriam).

1944

School meals started in Evercreech after a kitchen was built on to the school in March 1944. The first meals were served up with the help of the ladies of the WI, even before the kitchen had running water or an electricity supply.

In September 1944 more evacuees arrived from Kent to escape flying bombs. This time the Vicar offered the use of his dining room which became a classroom. The children loved all the moving from one place to another. Instead of classes all being in the same room with only playtime and lunch time to break up their day, there was constant movement as the rota was implemented to allow each school to get some teaching time. For the teachers it must have been a logistical nightmare, getting all the books, materials and children to the right places and occupying children when it was not their turn to use one of the available rooms. The numbers of evacuees varied but in October 1944 there were 103 evacuees being taught with 92 local children.

The WI and the WVS were busy raising money and knitting. They made shawls for the European Relief Scheme. When wool for 'Garments for Liberated Europe' arrived in the village a plea went out to WI and WVS members to knit up the wool. All over Europe there were refugees displaced from their homes often with few possessions. They lacked food, shelter and clothes, so schemes to make warm clothing were started up everywhere. Along with knitting for troops it kept women busy during the long hours of the blackout, although even knitting for the services meant parting with one coupon for each two ounces (50g) of wool.

Eric Dunford, who was in the fifth Dorset Regiment, died on 19th November when the Dorset Regiment were fighting to reinforce the airborne troops, including Tom Tidmarsh from Evercreech, who had landed at Arnhem (see In Memoriam). Eric was buried in Reichswald Cemetery in Germany, the same cemetery as Roy Amesbury (see In Memoriam). Both men were Evercreech born and both lie in the same plot far from home.

Another group of soldiers arrived in Evercreech in 1944. These men were African Americans, a great novelty in rural Somerset. They were army cooks and were billeted in Rockleaze. There was a large army hut in the garden the concrete base of which could still be seen in the early 1970s. Rationing was hitting the local population hard. The American cooks baked bread for their troops and Evercreech people were tantalised by the smell of fresh baked bread wafting over the village when they could only buy limited amounts of the National Loaf, a coarse wholemeal bread.

The soldiers gave out sweets at the school; older children, who went to secondary school in Shepton Mallet by a special train, remember standing on the platform when troop trains carrying Americans went through and the men threw sweets and chocolate bars from the train windows.

As D Day approached military activity in our area increased and it was not unusual to see a trainload of Bren Gun carriers passing though the station. With so much military activity on the railway, the Home Guard had to provide men to watch the rail bridges at night.

The African American soldiers put on events in the Village Hall; as Jim Doble recalled '*new American films were shown weekly with villagers invited to watch and dances when the village hall echoed to the sound of an American jazz band with jitterbugging.*' For the men, being able to dance with white women was a complete novelty; in the USA that was strictly forbidden by segregation laws. In the UK no such racial barriers existed. The men brought fun and music into wartime Evercreech and were rewarded with friendship.

1945

Early in 1945 Royal Navy stoker William Taylor from the village died. He was taken ill on board his ship the aircraft carrier H.M.S. Indefatigable. He was put ashore in Sydney, Australia where he died in hospital and was buried there.

The last death of an Evercreech man is recorded as having taken place on 12th March 1945. Frederick Hartington Parker who was in the RAF, had been captured by the Japanese and imprisoned in Borneo. Given the dreadful reports of conditions on forced marches and in Japanese camps one can only imagine the horrors he endured (see In Memoriam).



Frederick Hartington Parker

As the war ended the Vicar took back his spare bedrooms and dining room, The Bell Inn no longer needed to find room for soldiers or classes of children and Charlton's builders had their carpenter's workshop back where coffins were probably made since, like many builders, they were undertakers too.

The servicemen and women began to come home, and POWs returned from long years in captivity.

According to The Shepton Mallet Journal on Victory in Europe (VE) Day, 8th May, Evercreech was displaying flags and bunting everywhere. After the Prime Minister's official announcement of the end of hostilities, the bells were rung and there was a special service that evening. The children gathered all the material they could find for a bonfire on the cricket field, similar fires could be seen from vantage points all around. The next day a dance, already arranged by the Evercreech Cadets, fitted in perfectly with the celebrations. The hall was packed with people in the right mood for celebration and dancing to the music of Arthur Sealey and his Rhythm Revellers. On Friday the school staff put on a 'Victory' Tea party for the children, including the remaining evacuees.



Home guard stand-down group and dinner.

On May 9th the Home Guard had a Stand-Down meal for 50 at The Bell Inn when photographs were taken.

A Thanksgiving Service held in St Peter's Church on 18th May conducted by the Vicar the Revd Bennet began with a procession led by Private H. Cox recently returned from a prisoner of war camp in Germany. He was followed by the Home Guard, Civil Defence, The Royal British Legion, Red Cross, Guides and Brownies, all marshalled by ex-Regimental Sergeant Major R. Goverd, a First World War veteran.

A social evening was held at The Bell Inn on 1st June to welcome home Privates H. Cox and J. Hoddinott who had been prisoners of war in Germany. The event was organised by the Royal British Legion and cheques were presented to the men.

The black-out curtains were taken down in the school but kept for use in film shows. The first 'Official Unaccompanied School Children's Evacuation Party' was taken by bus to Shepton Mallet in June 1945 where they were put on a train for London. More children left on 13th July, leaving only 40 evacuee children at the school with 104 local children. One of the West Ham teachers asked to stay in the village where she had lived for five years since she had no home to return to since the blitz. She was allowed to extend her time in Evercreech until June 1946 when she had to return to her London school. In post war decades many ex-evacuees came back to visit the village where they had been made welcome.

The war changed all communities. Evercreech people had met servicemen from the USA with whom they had shared much needed fun and music in dark times. There was fear for family and friends serving in our forces and, for some, bereavement. There were hardships and the need to 'make do and mend' but in consequence society was far less wasteful than we are now. The wartime generation developed resources which carried them through. We would do well to learn from their example.



I WISH TO MARK BY THIS PERSONAL MESSAGE
my appreciation of the service you have rendered to your
Country in 1939-

In the early days of the War you opened your door to strangers
who were in need of shelter, & offered to share your home with
them.

I know that to this unselfish task you have sacrificed much
of your own comfort, & that it could not have been achieved
without the loyal co-operation of all in your household.
By your sympathy you have earned the gratitude of those to
whom you have shown hospitality, & by your readiness to
serve you have helped the State in a work of great value —

Elizabeth R

Mrs. Lambert.

Certificate of Royal Thanks

In Memoriam

Anthony Douglas Brodie

Usually known by which name he appears on the War Memorial, Douglas Brodie had been a Royal Naval Reserve cadet from the age of 23. During the war he became a Lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve and was stationed at H.M.S. Kestrel a Naval Air station at Worthy Down in Hampshire. On 7th July 1942 he was piloting a Percival Proctor training plane with two crew when the port folding wing flap failed, the plane broke up and crashed at Thames Side Farm near Abingdon. Douglas Brodie aged 35 with his crew Leading Airman L.A. Newall aged 18 and Leading Wren (radio) P.A. Tansley aged 19 were all killed. Lieutenant Brodie was buried in the churchyard at Itchen Abbas where his wife Juliane lived.



Percival Proctor 4-seater Aircraft

Denis Roy Belfield

Roy Belfield lived with his parents at Melbury Villa in Evercreech; his father was a village postman. Before the war Roy worked on a farm at Stoney Stratton and friends recalled that he loved the farm and did not want to go into the forces. Roy, aged 20, lost his life on HMS Samphire (a Flower class corvette) which was sunk by an Italian ship on 30th January 1943 off the coast of North Africa.



HMS Samphire

Roy Locke Amesbury

Roy Amesbury was a Pilot Officer Air Bomber in the Royal Air Force Volunteers. He was the son of Christopher and Jessie Amesbury of Prospect Villas in Evercreech. Mr Amesbury Snr was an engine driver on the railway. Roy's plane was shot down on 23rd June 1943 by a night fighter over Germany. The plane crashed at Hamminkeln, north west of Wesel. Roy was one of four crew who died in the crash, one man survived and was taken prisoner. Roy is buried at Reichswald Forest War Cemetery at Nordrhein-Westfalen near the Dutch border.



Wellington Bomber

Eric Dunford

Eric Dunford's father worked at the creamery. Eric was fighting with the Dorset Regiment on 19th November 1944 when they were trying to relieve the Airborne troops who had landed at Arnhem. The action resulted in terrible loss of life. One of those who died was Eric Dunford. He is buried in Reichswald Forest Cemetery where Roy Amesbury also lies.



Frederick Hartington Parker

Frederick Parker had a twin brother who also fought in the Second World War but survived. Frederick, a corporal in the RAF, had the misfortune to be taken prisoner by the Japanese and kept in Sandakan Camp in Borneo; he died there on 12th March 1945. The cause of his death is not known but given the conditions in the camps it could have been disease, starvation or ill treatment. His name is on the Singapore Memorial.



Sandakan War Memorial

William Taylor

William Taylor, whose family lived in Maesdown Cottages, was a stoker on HMS Indefatigable, an aircraft carrier deployed to the far east in late 1944. William was taken ill when the ship was sailing to Sydney Australia. He was taken off the ship to a hospital in Sydney where he died on 17th February 1945.



HMS Indefatigable

Appendix

Transcript of Enlisted Men and Women on display in The Bell Inn

W. Wenmouth RN	G. Jones Middx Reg	A. Cockle Coldstream Guards
R. Woodbourne RAF	L. Woods RA	P. Allen RAF
J. Cox RN	C. Dunford RAF	H. Cox RAOC Cox RM
A. Crago NSY	R. Ashman RA	E. Lambert RAF
J. Luff NSY	S. Charlton RE.	K. Weeks RAF
R. White RASC	S. White RA	J. Hinton RASC
A. Onslow	J. Merryfield RAMC	A. Tidmarsh Paras
C. Adams RA	F. White RASC	S. Shoebridge RA
J. Hoddinott RE	H. Parker KOSB	W. Arnold DCLI
A. Smith RAF	D. Brodie RNVR	C. Moore RA
G. Carter RAF	G. Patterson RA	D. Jones
A. Carter RAF	R. Amesbury RAF	C. Fear
F. Gregory RWY	D. Ashman RAF	R. Dunford RN
T. White Parachute R	W. Field RA	
H. Baber RA	G. Creed RAC	
H. White SLI	J. Cleeves RASC	
H. Cox Glos Reg	R. Catley RAF	
F. Parker RAF	A. Edwards SLI	S. Moody WAAF
A. Riggs RE	F. Hill RCS	K. Carew WAAF
S. Collis SLI	F. Smith RASC	B. Wingrove WAAF
R. Whale RN	E. Dunford Dorset Reg	O. Naish ATS
W. Wenmouth RASC	F. Street REME	T. Lucas VAD
L. Southway RAF	W. Taylor RN	D. Taylor WAAF
E. Dunford RAF	D. Mathews RN	O. Pocock VAD
P. Herlock CMP	L. Charlton RA	P. Bryant ATS
D. Oliver RA	R. Belfield RN	A. Bryant WAAF
S. Ashman RA	E. Hooper RN	D. Adams WAAF
K. Edwards REME	M. Read RAF	J. Fry VAD
G. Edwards RAF	R. Higgins RN	C. Pitt
K. Hardacre RTR	R. Charlton	P. Woodbourne RA
J. Kellaway RE	C. Wingrove RN	A. Bond
M. Oliver RAF	H. Lucas RA	B. Biggin WAAF
H. Oliver SLI	F. Cox REME	M. Jewell WRNS
D. Oliver RE	J. Lucas Wilts	L. Charlton
S. Gregory REME	W. Dunford RE	
B. Gregory RA	J. Jeffery RE	
E. Hoddinott RAF		

Selected Pages From The War Book.

LIST OF WELLS IN EVERCREECH.

Mrs.Davis's Cottages, Shapway Lane.
Batts Cottage. Pump.
The Novells, Shapway Lane.
The Pilberts, Prestleigh Road.
Mr.A.Feaver, Victoria Square.
Mr.Haines, Victoria Square.
Mr.W.Brown, Back Hays.
Mr.Hillard, Victoria Square.
Mr.Clark, Victoria Square.
E.J.Allen & Son, Ferndale, Victoria Square.
Dr.D.Brodie, Park House,
Mr.C.A.Read, High Street.
Well at Church Cross.
Mr.Treeby. Pump.
Mr.T.Clifford.
Mrs.Weekes, Hampton Cottage.
Well in field Coal Acre.
Rev. Bennett, The Vicarage.
Mr.H.Wines, Oxford Street.
Misses. Leversedge, Oxford Street, Pump.
Mr.W.Lucas, Weymouth Road.
Mr.R.Lucas, Weymouth Road.
Mr.F.Brown, Brewers Arms.
Mr.F.Stride, Weymouth Road.
Sunnybank, Weston Town. Pump.
Mr.Leversedge, Weston Town. Pump.
Mrs.Brown, Weston Town.
Mrs.R.Upshall, Weston Town.
Mr.G.Luff, Weston Town.
Mrs.Webb. Weston Town.
Mr.H.Reakes, Weston Town.
Mr.A.Clark, Weston Town.



PART XIX. EMERGENCY TRANSPORT.

The following list embraces all known forms of transport, which could be called for used in the event of emergency.

(1). LORRIES. MOTOR.

R.C.Green & Son.	Evercreech.	2 Lorries.
F. & P.R.Brown.	"	2 Lorries.
A.Feaver & Son.	"	2 Lorries.
Allen & Son.	"	1 Lorry.
C. & G.Prideaux.	"	2 Lorries.

(2). VANS. MOTOR.

Allen & Son.	Evercreech.	1 Van.
C.Hayes, Pecking Mill.	"	1 Van.
W.Down, Albions Vale.	"	1 Van.
W.Hillard.	"	1 Van.
Hobbs & Son.	"	1 Van.

(3). TRACTORS.

J.P.Luff.	Evercreech.	1 Tractor.
A.Down, Albions Vale.	"	1 Tractor.
Mees, Stratton.	"	1 Tractor.
A.Sealey, Maesdown.	"	1 Tractor.

(4). HORSES & CARTS.

W.Down, Albions Vale.	Evercreech.	2 Horses	1 Cart.
J.P.Luff, Rodmore.	"	2 "	1 "
H.Corp, Church Farm.	"	2 "	1 "
Mees, Stratton.	"	1 "	1 "
Baber, Stratton.	"	1 "	1 "
L.James, "	"	1 "	1 "
H.Doble, "	"	1 "	1 "

(5). PRIVATE CARS.

K.Hill, Stratton.	Evercreech.	1 Car.
E.F.Hill, "	"	1 "
E.J.O.Hill, "	"	1 "
H.Doble, "	"	1 Car.
J.P.Luff, "	"	1 "
Gulliver, "	"	1 "
Mees, "	"	1 "
P.Albn, "Ferndale",	"	1 "
O.J.Woodborne, Prestleigh Rd, "	"	1 "
Clarke, The Stores,	"	1 "
W.Hillard, The Square,	"	1 "
W.Feaver,	"	1 "
L.Creed, Westbrook,	"	1 "
G.Luff, Westontown,	"	1 "
A.Allen,	"	1 "
Jones, Shapway Inn,	"	1 "
M.Luff, Rodmore,	"	1 "
C.Neale, The Filberts,	"	1 "

Moore & Modern Methods, Ltd., London.
 To repeat order state "13"43" Feint

PART. XVIII. EMERGENCY TOOLS & PLANT.

Wheelbarrows.	12.
Shovels.	36.
Spades.	36.
Pickaxes.	18.
Crowbars.	10.
Buckets.	50.
Brushes.	24.
Ladders.	12.

Timber available in builders yards at Stratton and Everereech.

Dump ballast available for bomb craters. This material is on the Higher Stratton Road.

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